"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12).

"In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." (Ephesians 1:5).

"And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father! So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:6).

"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," (Romans 8:15-16).

At this point in our studies on the application of redemption through Christ, it is a good time to summarize what has been discussed so far. This should help us better understand what follows. We have used the term "order of salvation"[1] to present a logical sequence in God's work of salvation for sinners. We have emphasized, and will do so again, that this order is a human convention. In other words, it is a construct of systematic theology that helps us see the order in which God's work of salvation unfolds. It is by no means intended to presuppose that we understand the mysteries of God's work to bring sinners "out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). The Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, sovereignly works according to His eternal plan. So much of the application of redemption has not been fully revealed to us. Nonetheless, our gracious God has given us much light through His Word, which is necessary for our instruction and training in living a way that honors Him. A.W. Tozer, the wonderful Christian author and teacher from bygone days, once said, "All God wanted to say He has said in the Scriptures. Beyond that, we show the greatest wisdom to remain still before Him and whisper, Even so, Father."[2] The Scripture teaches us that "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of the law." (Deuteronomy 29:29). Given our limited understanding of God's work, we must acknowledge that we are time-bound creatures. The infinite God, however, stands outside of time. If God sovereignly ordains that someone should receive the gift of eternal life, in the "mind"[3] of God that work is accomplished, and nothing can stand in its way.

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[1] The Latin term, *ordo salutis*, (Order of Salvation), was in prominent usage during the Protestant Reformation.
[2] A.W. Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2018) 40
[3] Used anthropomorphically. The eternal God is a Spirit.

In the first study of this series, we learned from Holy Scriptures that before time even existed, God chose a people to inherit eternal life. In theology, this is referred to as the doctrine of election. The Word of God is very clear on this matter, and many verses substantiate it. One example is from Paul's letter to Ephesus, where he writes, "***even as he chose us in him*** before the foundations of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). We also know from the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17 that God the Father has given God the Son an elect people. In the Lord's prayer, He said, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." (John 17:6). Following the grace of election, in the order of salvation, we studied God's calling. Again, there are numerous verses we could quote about the call of God. The apostle's writings to the Romans are just one. "And those whom he predestined ***he also called***, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:30). Following our study on God's call, we looked at the work of God in regeneration. Another, more common term used in place of regeneration is "born again."

In regeneration, God gives the believer spiritual life. It is a one-time act of God's grace. In the words of the Savior to the religious leader Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, ***unless one is born again***, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3). Once born again by the Spirit of God, a person is able, by God's grace, to turn from sin and turn to Christ. This is known as repentance and faith. In the order of salvation, this is referred to as conversion. The command to repent and believe is reiterated throughout Scripture. It was the first of Jesus's sayings in the Gospel of Mark. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; ***repent and believe*** in the gospel." (Mark 1:15). We said that conversion is followed by a change in our legal standing before God, known as justification. Justification by faith teaches us the glorious truth that God views the Christian as righteous! He does so because of the righteousness of Christ, the Son of Man. The Bible teaches us that His righteousness is credited to us, and we are declared by the Judge of all the earth **NOT GUILTY**! "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So, we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be ***justified by faith in Christ*** and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

This brings us in our series to a new topic that is part of the order of salvation called adoption. Adoption is the sixth study in our series. For your reference, the complete list of the "order of salvation" is provided below.

1) Election refers to God's choice of people to be saved.
2) The Gospel Call (God calling sinners out of darkness).
3) Regeneration (being born again).
4) Conversion (faith and repentance).
5) Justification (right legal standing).
6) **Adoption (membership in God's family).**
7) Sanctification (proper conduct of life).
8) Perseverance (remaining a Christian).
9) Death (going to be with Christ).

A simple yet accurate definition of the doctrine of adoption is that God makes the believer part of His family. To quote the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question number 34. Question 34: What is Adoption?" Answer: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all privileges of the sons of God." The Scriptures establish that adoption is a one-time, non-repeatable act of God's grace, ensuring that those who have been born again are welcomed into God's family as dearly loved sons and daughters. One might reasonably ask, didn't a Christian become part of God's family at the moment of conversion? Or, if not, then didn't the Christian become part of God's family when they were justified by faith? While those are fair questions to ask, it seems that the Bible distinguishes those works of God's grace from His work of adoption. Professor Douglas Kelly provides helpful comments on this matter. He writes, "Adoption is not the same thing as regeneration, though it is closely connected to it. It is not really possible for us humans to put an exact temporal order on all the varying aspects on what takes place in union with Christ. For instance, regeneration and adoption must be considered together, but we cannot put an exact temporal order upon them. Yet we can, and must (to assist our limited understanding), make a certain theological distinction between them."[4] The objective of this study is to help us, as the Word of

[4] Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology Volume Three* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021) 169

God directs us, distinguish the grace of God's adoption from other aspects of His grace in the application of redemption.

In God's work of regeneration and justification, both being one-time acts of His grace, salvation is the central focus. It is not quite the case with adoption. Although adoption is one of the fruits of salvation, this aspect of redemption (salvation) is not the primary focus that we find in Scripture. Instead, in adoption, the emphasis and focus are more on the believer's relationship with God as a member of His family. These are the people that the Apostle John writes of in the first chapter of his Gospel. "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13). Those born of God are sons and daughters in the family of God. We often hear it said, "We are all God's children." If this means we were all created by God, I agree. However, it is also true that only those adopted into Christ are actual sons and daughters of God. It is only those "born again" who are family members!

In one sense, adoption is similar to justification. Like justification, adoption is also a legal judicial act. It involves our standing, or status, before God. In justification, we have a righteous status because of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. In adoption, our status is that of family members placed with God as our Father. We are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. While we can agree that, in one sense, there is such a thing as the universal fatherhood of God, it should never be confused with the adopted fatherhood that those in union with Jesus Christ possess. John Murray is adamant about not confusing universal fatherhood with that of an adopted fatherhood in the family of God. He writes, "Though there is a sense in which universal fatherhood may be maintained, yet to confuse this with adoptive fatherhood is to distort and even eviscerate one of the most precious and distinctive elements of the redemptive provision. For if we do not distinguish at this point, it means two things: the denial of all that is specifically redemptive in our concept of fatherhood, or the importation into the relation that all men sustain to God by creation all the privileges and prerogatives that adoption entails. On the former alternative, God's fatherhood is emptied of all the rich content Scripture attaches to it. On the latter alternative, we shall have to espouse universalism and the final restoration of all mankind."[5] We do well to heed Professor Murray's advice and distinguish between the adoption

[5] John Murray, Vol. 2 *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977) 233

into God's family through the work of Christ and a universal fatherhood based on our shared Creator!

It is interesting to note that some of the older systematic theology books do not cover adoption as a separate category in the application of redemption.[6] One example would be L. Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* which has been a long-time staple in the curriculum at many seminaries. Berkhof views adoption as a subtopic within a broader study on justification. He emphasizes that adoption is an essential aspect of the benefit that comes with salvation, but he does not believe it warrants a whole chapter. Another example is the *Systematic Theology* written by Charles Hodge, an early professor at the original Princeton Seminary. Like many 19th-century reformed theologians, Hodge discusses adoption but does not treat it as a separate subject. In Volume 2 of Hodge's Systematic Theology, adoption is addressed within his treatment of soteriology.[7] It does seem that Scripture places particular emphasis on the adoption, stressing that Christians have become part of the family of God. Specific benefits, privileges, and theological significance are emphasized.

First, in terms of benefits, all those who are adopted as children of God receive the Spirit of adoption. This enables the believer to call out to God, saying "Abba, Father." We see this in Romans 8:15. The apostle writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father!" The linguistic origin of the word "Abba" is Aramaic. The Lord Jesus uses this word in His prayer in Mark 14. The context is very significant. Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane shortly before His arrest. Mark tells us Jesus was "distressed and troubled." Soon, he would have to complete his mission of being the sacrificial "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus was not afraid to die; however, in His human nature, taking upon Himself the punishment for sin must have been overwhelming. It was in this context that Jesus prayed to the Father. "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36). Most scholars and commentators agree that the term "Abba" conveys trust and a certain intimacy that a child has with his father. We should think of a child calling out "papa' or "daddy" to understand how intimate usage of

[6] I am using the term "application of redemption" somewhat synonymously with the term "order of salvation."
[7] Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation.

"Abba." There is a particular love and trust expressed in the term. It should be the same love and trust that Christians have for God.

Adoption into God's family allows believers to experience God's special care, protection, and even discipline. This does not diminish the truth that all creation is under God's control and watchful eye. However, it does indicate that there are unique blessings and privileges for God's adopted children who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian's position as adopted sons and daughters is eternal and cannot be taken away from them! They are sealed by the Holy Spirit, awaiting the revealing of God's children on the "day of redemption.""[8] We must never forget that the position a believer has within the family of God is all because of God's grace!

Adoption in Christ, and therefore into the family of God, brings a person into the "body"[9] of Christ. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses "body" as a metaphor for both the universal and local church. In this metaphor, the Lord Jesus Christ is the "head" of the church. Christians are the various members of the "body," each having a specific role and function to accomplish.

In addition to the privileges of being adopted into the family of God, every believer has responsibilities within the body. The Holy Spirit has gifted God's people to build each other up in love and good deeds. Believers are called to gather for worship and prayer. In the church, believers observe two specific ordinances commanded by Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. From a biblical perspective, Baptism[10] and the Lord's Supper[11] are considered the two primary ordinances given by Christ to the church. Both are symbolic acts. In the Lord's Supper, the local church body remembers the giving of the body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of the believer's sins. In Baptism, the new believer publicly identifies themselves with the death, burial, and resurrection of their gracious Lord. Baptism is only offered to those who have made a credible confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

God has ordained that the local church is the place where the body grows in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is the local church that is built up through preaching and teaching the Word of God. Through this means of God's grace, hearing the inspired Scriptures proclaimed

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[8] See Ephesians 4:30.
[9] 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 is the Apostle Paul's most detailed narrative of the "body" metaphor.
[10] Commanded by Christ as part of the "Great Commission." See Matthew 28:18-20.
[11] The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 recounts the tradition he received from the Lord, emphasizing the meaning of the bread and cup as a proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes.

builds up the believer in faith. This is why we read in the letter to the Romans, "So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Christians within the church of Christ are called to strive for unity, love, and peace with one another. In this regard, the Apostle Paul, writing to the church at Ephesus (and thus to all believers), states, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Within the church, believers are called to pray for and with one another. Again, writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of prayer. He urges them, saying, "Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). Certainly, of all people, the adopted children of God are most accountable for living a life pleasing to God. The motivation of the believer should be one of love. This is because Christ loved them and gave Himself for them! The adopted children of God are to consider others better than themselves. They must consider the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and strive to emulate Him. The Apostle Paul gives this instruction to the church:

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:3-11).

If you are reading these words as a Christian, we, including the author of this study, need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves what evidence do I show in my life that I have been, by the grace of God, adopted into the family of God? In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying,

'Abba! Father! So, you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." (Galatians 4:4-7). Do our hearts cry out to God, "Abba! Father!" All those in Christ are no longer slaves to the world, flesh, and the devil! Are we seeing some progress in overcoming certain sins in our lives? Sins that weigh us down and "cling so closely."[12] As adopted children of God, we are heirs of eternal life. We are fellow heirs with Christ![13] We should note that there is a certain sense in which we are heirs now, but there is also a fuller, future aspect of being an heir. This is when the believer will be united with his/her resurrected body! "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Romans 8:22-25). Dear Christian, do you ever think about the redemption of your body? I fear that many of us are so consumed with life's activities, whether good or bad, that we spend so little time reflecting on our adoption as sons and the new resurrected bodies that God will provide for us.

In our study on regeneration (born again), we made the statement that Scripture highlights the Holy Spirit as the primary source of this work. In the process of adopting God's people into His family, Scripture emphasizes God the Father as the primary source of adoption. It does appear that Reformed confessions consistently emphasize that it is God the Father who, out of His love and grace, preordained believers for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. The Letter of 1 John shines light on this work of the Father. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." (1 John 3:1). The Apostle Paul's teaching is the same for the Ephesians. Douglas Kelly touches on this topic. He writes, "Although it is given in a different context,[14] we see the priority of the Father in this matter of adoption in Ephesians 3:14,15: 'For this reason I bow my knees ***before the Father***, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.'"[15] While this is true, there is perfect harmony and unity within the Godhead regarding adoption and all other facets of the

[12] See Hebrews 12:1
[13] See Romans 8:9-11.
[14] Different context Kelly refers to in regards to 1 John.
[15] Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology Volume Three* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021) 169

order of salvation. In summary, while Scripture presents God the Father as the primary author and initiator of adoption, this work is accomplished in and through the Son and applied by the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you are reading this study and have not yet become part of God's blessed family. My friend, the door is wide open for you! Hear the words of Jesus Christ, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20). These great truths that we have been studying are all the work of God's grace. Christians have nothing to boast about in themselves. They can only boast in their Lord and Savior. The grace of God is calling you today to look to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your guilt and shame. It is calling you to forsake your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. A.W. Tozer once said, "God was always gracious. He never has been less gracious than He is now, and He never will be more gracious than He is now. But until sin came into the world, God's grace was not evident."[16] Dear Reader, God's grace is abundant, and it is for you! The Bible declares that everyone is guilty of sin: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians in the city of Ephesus, said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Are you tired of running away from God? Are you exhausted from doing things you know are wrong but continue to do anyway? Perhaps sexual sins are your struggle? Maybe it's the great god of this world, money? You could be fleeing from God by using alcohol and drugs, which only push you further away! Further from God, but also further from the people you love and care about. Whatever it may be, there is good news for you and everyone else in this world. That is what the word "gospel" means: simply "good news." Perhaps even now, you will bow your head and cry out to God to open your heart. God has shown His love by sending His beloved Son into this world to die a brutal death for you. Now, my friend, Jesus is speaking directly to you: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). Please don't ignore His call to you. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! "If you confess

[16] Tozer, *The Quotable Tozer*, 150

with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9).

From whence this fear and unbelief?
Hast thou, O Father, put to grief
Thy spotless Son for me?
And will the righteous Judge of men
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged on thee?

Complete atonement thou hast made,
And to the utmost dollar paid
Whate'er thy people owed;
How then can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with thy blood?

If thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn, then, my soul, unto thy rest.
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty.
Trust in his efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

Author: Augustus Toplady, 1772